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## CITY PLANNING AND THE PROBLEM OF RECREATION

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In providing for recreation, if recreation be rightly understood, city planning reaches its apex. So broad a statement needs explanation.

Two ideals have mainly dominated city planning in the last hundred years. The first was the ideal of civic splendor which, in America, became the city beautiful idea. The second ideal was business facility.

America has, indeed, passed beyond these limits, if the campaign against congestion, and policies involving the social use of taxation, be regarded as methods of city planning. But in general, our thought has been pretty constantly focussed on civic splendor, business facility, and the adjustment of city life to what may be called the organic needs including the physical health of the people.

But so far we have not planned cities from the viewpoint of social organization. In social organization are comprehended the psychic and esthetic interests and leisure-time avocations of the people. The dynamic agencies of society must be sought in the psychic, aesthetic and leisure-life interests, and these interests depend on a proper physical basis, just as much as do the business and health interests of a city.

City planning for recreation means the provision of a proper physical basis for social organization.

The word "recreation" is a misnomer and does not adequately convey the meaning which has been put into it by modern usage. Recreation, in an economically modern society, means substantially life itself.

Before the age of machinery, production was carried out on the small-unit basis. Social relations were identical with work relations. The father-son relation was the rule of trade. A single worker, an artisan, controlled many or all of the processes represented in the finished product. He often marketed his own product. Under these

conditions, work was life-enhancing and more vital than anything else. Recreation could justly be viewed as a means of recuperation for work.

The introduction of machinery has caused profound changes in the nature of work, in the meaning of work both to mind and body, and in the social organization of work. Large-unit production has replaced the small unit. Minute specialized movements have taken the place of the large-muscle movements and self-expression of manual work. The worker has necessarily lost all sentiment of identity between himself and his product. Industrial cities have grown like mushrooms, while the population centers have grown to be more nondescript; and while the units of production have been growing larger, work in its meaning to the individual has grown smaller.

In brief, work has become, through the direct or indirect influence of machinery, a greatly reduced part of life, when we view life subjectively.

The change in leisure has been almost as great as the change in work. The old leisure institutions have either passed away, or have shrunk to a point where they no longer have a controlling influence in life. Commercialized amusement has grown to a volume utterly unknown in past generations. Commercialized amusement generally means specialized amusement and amusement which appeals to one sex or age group, not to neighborhoods or to family groups. Commercialized amusement, moreover, has very often an ulterior motive; the saloon has a political motive, for example, the dance hall has often a sinister motive of corruption. The total quantity of leisure has vastly increased and there has proceeded a corresponding reduction both in the variety and the attractiveness of the social institutions through which leisure life has expressed itself during many ages.

It has been said that leisure time is a void to be filled. Such a figure of speech is quite inadequate. It would be more truthful to say that the vital interests of mankind, with all their possibilities and perils, have been forced out of work into leisure, where they continue to operate with all their primal vigor, but without the facilities for expression or the traditions of behavior which are necessary to insure healthful results.

The recreation problem here merely hinted at has been proved to be measurably responsible for many oppressive ills. Among these ills are the increase of juvenile delinquency, the deterioration of

working girls, the saloon influence in politics, and the vast blackmail which depends on our unscientific repressive laws; the loss of control by the educational system over its pupils before they are sixteen years old, the disappearance of neighborhood life in many cities, and, finally, the breaking up of the family group. For the family, deprived of its opportunity to work together, is now forbidden to play together.

City planning must absolutely precede the solution of the problem of recreation.

At present, it can be broadly stated, regarding America:

That no city has enough play area, so distributed that the majority of its people can use the facilities.

That in all cities, political and civic discussion must be enjoyed mainly in private premises or in premises connected with saloons or controlled by persons who do not favor free discussion.

That organized social life, in all cities, must be carried out in premises subject to the same criticism that holds good of political meeting places.

That women, especially, are without provision, either public or private, for their leisure time or leisure interests.

That there are almost no places in American cities where family groups, as groups, are permitted or invited to come in such wise that the leisure life of the members will be a family life.

That 95 per cent of our children have no play spaces except the streets where they violate ordinances and statutes through the mere act of playing, where they are a real annoyance to the public and where their own life and limb are in danger. Recent investigations by the People's Institute, based on previous investigations by the Sage Foundation, prove that 70 per cent at least of all male juvenile crime in New York City is directly due to street play or to the effort to play in forbidden places.

Finally, it must be said that public property, worth several billions of dollars, is going to waste. School properties lie idle during the long summer season and are in use only for about six hours per day when used. The waste through nonuse of playgrounds, school buildings, armories, etc., involves a sacrifice of tax-payers' money amounting to probably a hundred million dollars a year. An intelligent development of these properties would modify enormously, and healthfully, the social environment of all cities without exception.

*The City-Planning Program*

City planning for recreation means only in slight measure the acquisition of new kinds of properties. It is the existing properties which must be differently planned and differently grouped.

*a. Schools.* American wastefulness and modern specialization find few better illustrations (or worse) than in the way our public school properties are built and used. The public investment in school properties is enormous. In New York City, the school investment has been \$100,000,000 in the thirteen years since 1900. In that same city, where school buildings are used in a relatively intensive way, the recent school inquiry developed the fact that the plant lies idle more than 40 per cent of the available working time. The percentage would be materially larger if the country were taken as a whole.

But the above statement of 40 per cent non-use only partially conveys the facts. It relates to the buildings as they exist, placed as they are in relation to the other physical elements of the city. Most of the schools are without open court yards or auditoriums. Their roofs are generally unavailable for open-air recreational purposes. The school buildings are usually not adjacent to open areas; there is rarely any correlation between the location of schools and of playgrounds. There is no physical correlation between schools, playgrounds, public libraries and baths. If the New York school buildings, in correlation with the other educational and recreative features of public provision, could be replanned with a view to the maximum of varied and integrated use, the human value of the school building would be multiplied several fold. In other words, to criticize the New York school buildings in terms of modern theories of education and recreation would involve a statement, not that they were unused for forty per cent of their available time, but that 70 or 80 per cent of their possible usefulness was being sacrificed.

To translate this statement, which applies to every American city with a few partial exceptions, into terms of a practical program, one would say:

1. Schools should be united or associated with open play spaces, indoor recreation houses and libraries.

2. Where the city has already been built, but where schools, playgrounds or libraries are still needed in congested districts, these properties should, whenever possible, be planted alongside some

companion facility, in such a way that they can supplement one another.

3. Buildings should be planned, or wherever possible, remodelled, in such a way as to provide meeting rooms, assembly halls, dance floors, spaces for indoor team games and, in general, those facilities which the people now purchase dearly from commerce, or get in a scattered way through insufficient public provision.

With the above physical propositions in mind, we can undertake a statement of the reasons why the physical correlation of educational and leisure-time institutions is not merely a measure of economy but is a social necessity.

The average age at which children leave school is not over fifteen years. Most of the socially useful qualities of adult life will be made or marred by the child's experience between fourteen years and twenty. The social nature, even in its biological aspect, is quite largely a growth of the adolescent period.

The school gives up the child. Just at this time, the family also gives up the child. Family influence cannot pursue the adolescent into the shop where he works, into the street or isolated playground, or into the commercial resorts where he must get most of his amusement.

One can hardly overstate the cost to society of this condition. It is a mad waste of social resources and of educational influence. It is a silent menace to our country. This condition cannot be met through any plan of going backward. Neither the family, as it formerly lived within the walls of the home, nor the church as a separationist agency, nor the influence of unconscious community tradition, can be revived in their old forms. They are disappearing institutions. On the contrary, church and family must be brought out into the market-place and the social center. We may hope for no solution for this problem short of the creation of a leisure-time environment, frequented by family and social groups, where new community interests and civic enthusiasms may be engendered to take the place of shattered community tradition and waning ecclesiastical inspiration.

It is of the utmost importance, and it is important in framing a city-planning program, to understand the impossibility of compensating, through specialized institutions of any kind, for the neighborhood, the institutional and family influences which held life together in the past. Public libraries as such, public baths as such, park prome-

nades as such, vocational bureaus as such—all of these things are convenient to the individual but are not socially constructive. They touch life so lightly or so specifically that they cannot influence the standards or habits of the people at large. The habit-forming influences in American communities are at this time much more largely of the nature of commercialized amusement, competitive business and predatory political organization, and they do not form such habits as a progressive society needs.

At present our parks and playgrounds, our libraries, our lecture centers are all specialized and separationist institutions. They separate the members of the family, they separate the individual from his group, they separate age groups from one another, they provide isolated oases in the lives of a minority of individuals, and it can hardly be said that the civic interest functions through any of them. On the contrary, the social center, being primarily a neighborhood institution, with elements of self government and self support, combines the social, the utilitarian, and the civic elements of leisure life. Better one social center than a score of specialized facilities.

If this vision of the meaning of leisure time and its peculiar needs be once clearly grasped, almost anybody can formulate a city plan with reference to recreation.

*b. Parks.* No country has the extensive park systems of America. Most of our park systems have been planned according to the higher esthetic ideals, in fact, according to aristocratic ideals. We have taken it for granted that any remodeling of park systems to accord with modern and human needs involves a necessary sacrifice of the esthetic elements of the park.

That this assumption is erroneous can be seen by any one who visits any of a dozen Chicago small parks, like some of the Chicago West parks, which have been developed exclusively for social and play purposes yet whose architecture is beautiful, and whose landscape work is classic. Chicago affords another suggestive illustration in its Lincoln Park, where the play area supplements the promenade area, and where the promenade area is insured against vandalism through the very fact of nearby opportunities for organized play.

In planning parks, almost as much as in planning schools, it is important to remember the facts of neighborhood life, of family life, and of the tendency of human beings to play in groups. The playground need not be merely a place for supervised play by children

during the daylight hours. It will be a much more wholesome children's playground if it be likewise a community social center, used in the evenings as well as by day. The playground can be an excellent musical center in the evenings. It can provide for open-air dancing; for open-air moving pictures. An arena with provision for spectators is always desirable, for this will make possible team games, pageants, and other neighborhood events. The limitation of space must always be borne in mind. For instance, where one municipal golf link may now occupy forty acres, there could be placed a hundred tennis courts, archery courts, croquet parks, or similar facilities for games which enlist large numbers of people in team play and team competition.

It is now generally recognized that it is better to have many small parks than an equal area of a large park out of reach of most of the people.

A careful study of the possibilities of minute playspots will always repay the effort. These spots may be no more than 50 feet by 50 feet, and yet may make a life's difference to the child.

*c. Other Facilities.* All that has been said about schools and playgrounds holds good for libraries, municipal buildings, and armories. The armories represent the climax of wastefulness. They are idle four-fifths of the time, although offering great expanse of both floor and roof, and being paid for, built and maintained by a public which does not believe in war.

### *Supplementary Policies*

The maximum development of the public properties and the physical integration of the facilities will still not provide for the whole leisure life of most of the people. There remain some promising lines of amelioration even in the most congested regions of the great cities. If it is proper to restrict or forbid traffic on resident streets, as is done in many cities, it is certainly proper to close off blocks in tenement districts and convert them into playgrounds, either continuously or during certain hours. Neither on such play streets, nor on regular playgrounds, is it necessary to have costly apparatus. There are many indications that a large part of all desirable juvenile play requires no apparatus, or little apparatus; that most children are inclined to run away from specialized apparatus, and from too much



supervision. It is known from extensive street surveys that at least one hundred educational games are carried on by the children of our great cities without supervision of any kind, and are transmitted from generation to generation of young people in ways little known to the grown-ups. All that is needed to build out of the spontaneous play life of any city an organized and systematic educational play life, is that physical space be provided and that status be given to those who excel in desirable games. This means the promotion, by the city or by play unions, of competitions and systems of honor like the systems which are practiced by the boy scouts, the camp fire girls, and which are modifying the outlook on civilization of millions of boys and girls.

A more controversial suggestion would be, that it is perfectly proper to require owners of tenements to develop their roofs as play grounds, and that it is perfectly proper for the community to regulate and supervise such places.

### *Conclusion*

Finally, were all these policies realized, we should still not be able wholly to redeem the leisure environment in congested districts, any more than we can hope to redeem the physical environment in these districts. City planning for leisure depends for its further reaches of possibility on those other departments of city planning which aim at the annihilation of the modern city as it has become known to us through the human ravages which it works. Fundamental modifications of taxation, a domination by the community over transit in all forms, and similar basic policies, lie underneath whatever is said above.

But let it be remembered, that the carrying out of all these fundamental policies, unless coupled with the true social art of city planning for leisure, might leave us a nation of Philistines living in cities of a prosperous and healthy Philistia.